"...'how many bombs were being dropped while we walked'..."

But does the middle American care?

by Mike Forth

In protest to President Nixon's escalation of the air war in Southeast Asia, a group of demonstrators recently staged a week-long, anti-war walk from Greenville to Columbia.

"Walk for Life," together with Columbia Earth Day groups, amassed approximately 500 people for its concluding public rally in Columbia's Saint Peter's Catholic Church.

The "Walk", as the demonstrators preferred to call it to distinguish it from the military connotations of the word "march", was sponsored by South Carolina Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC). It began at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 15, customary day for the payment of income taxes, when 25 war protestors departed from the Federal Building in Greenville.

The purpose of the 117-mile trek, according to Mrs. Leslie Turner, co-chairman of CALC, was "to ask the government to cease spending two-thirds of all taxes on war and war-related items, to give the citizens a reorientation of priorities by spending tax monies for the desperately needed goods in this county, and to stop the bombing in Southeast Asia."

The Greenville police department supplied the protestors with an escort to the city limits, and from there the South Carolina Highway Patrol and SLED drove beside the demonstrators.

During the first part of the walk, the demonstrators encountered some difficulties they had not anticipated. Sunburn, sore muscles, and blistered feet helped to make the first night's campsite, a front yard beside the road in Simpsonville, a welcome sight for the group.

John Lewis, a resident of Clemson, said that the demonstrators received encouragement from many motorists who showed peace signs as they passed. "One 76-year-old man even drove down from Woodruff to wish us well. He said he was a veteran of World War I."

The demonstrators obtained medical assistance from the Laurens Rescue Squad at St. James Methodist Church in Laurens, where they spent Sunday night. "They treated us for our sunburns, and they were very nice to us," said Mrs. Turner.

A couple of times, however, the group encountered some unfriendly reaction. Father Mike Kaney, a Catholic priest and staff member of CALC, said that "a few motorists shouted ugly things, like that we should be sent to Korea or Cuba or put on the front lines without guns, but the majority of the reaction we received was favorable." Kaney said that he preferred to remember the many more kind things that people did for them along the way. "Monday night a Joanna resident volunteered to let us sleep on the corner of his property, and Tuesday a 70-year-old woman met us on the road near Newberry to congratulate us for making such good time," he said.

Opinions varied among the demonstrators concerning the effect that their protest would have on other people. Joan Moncrief, a senior from Furman, said that she didn't think it would have much effect, but that it was "all you could do." She added, "It's really been good for the few people we've had the chance to talk to along the way."

Spencer Goad, a truck driver who was spending one of his two weeks of vacation to make the walk, said he thought that the demonstration would be very effective. "Everything that comes in contact with any person influences him to some degree", explained Goad.

On Saturday, April 22, many demonstrators from Columbia came out to meet the group from Greenville, and to march the final six miles into the State Capitol for a public rally. Among the protestors from Columbia was a group of about ten members of Vietnam Veterans Against The War, and two people who were confined to wheelchairs.

Despite a heavy downpour, the group of approximately 75 war protestors began to walk the last leg of their journey at 10 a.m. Chanting, "All we are saying is give peace a chance," and carrying banners which read, "Blessed are the Peacemakers" and "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men," the demonstrators paraded slowly down Main Street of Columbia toward the Capitol Building.

Gary Wong, a Vietnam Veteran who joined the march along the way, said that he had been a UH1 helicopter door gunner and was stationed in Da Trong for two years. "By demonstrating we are giving the people an awareness of what is going on overseas," he said. "We've been over there, and now it is our job to let the middle-aged, middle-class Americans know what is going on over there," added Wong.

Another protestor who joined the walk near Columbia, George Bowdler, said that he noticed a big improvement in the reaction of the town to the demonstrators since the anti-war march of 1968.

"When I marched in the anti-war protest here in 1968, there was quite a bit of hostility shown toward us from the town. The fact that you don't see it now is probably a good indication of the general change in attitude of most people since then," said Bowdler.

A routine escort of motorcycle policemen drove with the demonstrators to the steps of the Capitol, where about 400 more demonstrators waited to join the marchers for a public rally. However, due to the inclement weather, it was announced that the rally would take place in St. Peter's Catholic Church, some three blocks from the Capitol.

When the demonstrators were regrouped in the church, the rally began with a short talk by Father Kaney, who related the progress of the march for the benefit of those who had not been able to participate in the entire walk. "The really sad part about our demonstration," said Kaney, "was that we could only wonder to ourselves how many bombs were being dropped and how many people were being killed while we walked in our Walk for Life."

Poet Allen Ginsberg was next to address the demonstrators with a poetry reading against the "electric bomb war," Following the dramatic presentation, he sang a chant about birth and death, change and revolution.

Kaney

Following Ginsberg, Sister Margie Shemen, involved in the Harrisburg 7 trial, talked about the need to continue demonstrating against the war. "We have cried for justice and peace, and still there is no justice or peace, and so we march again," she said. "We cannot weary from waging peace until we have achieved the goal of saving the lives of those people which our government has marked for death," stated Shemen.

Ellis and Margie Reese, a couple from Augusta, then spoke about War Tax Resistance, urging all present to stop paying the telephone tax which goes toward supporting the war. They said that they had refused to pay the tax and were now willing to go to prison because of it if they were forced to do so. They also urged others to inflate the number of dependents on their income tax forms as they had also done. "I now claim 53 dependents — the 50 states of the United States and Loas, Cambodia, and Vietnam — because with my tax money I was paying for more than five dependents," said Ellis Reese.

Following declarations of solidarity with the protest by representatives of the Black Movement and Women's Rights movement, the rally was concluded with the announcement that one of the protestors was going to burn his draft card. As the young man lifted his flaming draft card into the air, the demonstrators applauded.

Cheap shots

Senator Edward Kennedy was in Columbia last week to speak to the South Carolina Education Assn., and he sounded very much like a presidential candidate when he spoke. He said he was against the war, against the bombing, against rich people not paying taxes while the poor must, and that we shouldn't build so many highways when children go uneducated for lack of funds.

Castro, okra, hippies

Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn, D-S.C., lifted his head from his okra and bean patch long enough to find himself the "odd-man-out" among House Democrats last week.

Long a supporter of President Nixon's "do-or-die" policy in Vietnam, Dorn surfaced as the leading hawk in the Democratic side of the fency by bucking his part's stand on the renewal of bombings over Hanoi and Haiphong.

A House Democratic caucus voted in a special meeting to support any and all legislation which would bind Nixon's further escalation of the war by undermining defense spending.

And, for his loyalty, Dorn was gifted as being the only person to receive any word from his Commander-in-Chief concerning the bombings.

"You have to let them have it when they jump on you," was, reportedly, Nixon's communique to the Greenwood legislator who is still riding high on the idea of a military victory in Vietnam.

Sold on the idea that the North Vietnam offensive was a move to pick up even more POW's with which to embarass Nixon, Dorn claims that American forces have been "stabbed in the back" by the enemy invaders.

On the home front, Congressman Dorn seems to be stepping into a mess of controversy on the whole issue of saving our country from the impending ecological crises.

Recently, Dorn lashed out at the Muskie Water Control Bill which he estimates will cost $1 trillion to finance. Senator Muskie, however, escaped virtually intact from Dorn's criticism but young environmentalists didn't.

"My guess is that those environmentalists were flower girls who got on the senators' knees, and the senators passed it (the bill) not ever knowing what was in it," the Congressman surmised. He also suggested that these same "flower girls" were friends of — you guessed it — Fidel Castro, who is bent on destroying our system. The bill in question passed 83-0.

To add to his list of ramblings, Dorn is also championing the Army Corps of Engineer's plans to flood the Trotters Shoals area, which, according to environmentalists, would wipe out one of the last remaining segments of wild river in the state and destroy 50,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

To further understand the lawmaker's political savvy, readers should contemplate this Dornism: "It's amazing how well a man can think among the rows of okra and corn."

After the flurry he's caused during the last few weeks, Congressman Dorn should remember Candide's resolution: "We must stick to our own garden."

Bouncing Bella

Apparently, State Senator Edgar Brown isn't the only person suffering from the reapportionment blues.

Bella Abzug, the Hedda Hopper of the 92nd Congress, has just found herself without a constituency.

According to insiders in the New York State Legislature, Bella's loss has nothing to do with her being a woman. The whole matter is a product of partisan gerrymandering and back-stabbing.

The Manhatten district which Bella represents now was due for oblivion in 1968, but then-Congressman Leonard Farbstein, a veteran of 16 years in the House, asked that his district be kept together until 1972 when he would be ready to retire on his handsome pension.

In 1970, Bella defeated Farbstein in the Democratic primary and won the election in November. Thus, a district which didn't legally exist had a fire-brand as a representative in Congress.

On her first day in her new job, Bella introduced a bill calling for an immediate end to the war in Vietnam and a total withdrawal of all U.S. troops stationed there. And she has also presented legislation demanding a censure of President Nixon for failing to live up to the specifications of a defense budget bill.

Her coarse, gritty sense of humor has also caused fellow Congressmen to shake at the mention of her name. Bella has a natural proclivity to "call 'em like she sees 'em" in the language of the New York streets.

Phil Tracy of the "Village Voice" suggests that Bella's "big mouth" and her candor are two reasons for her having been given the axe. And Bella accepts to being responsible for her plight.

"I admit I have the loudest voice in Washington. I am guilty of attacking Nixon. I am guilty of condeming the war. I am guilty of fighting for the rights of women. I am guilty of it all and intend to remain guilty just as I intend to remain in Congress. It will have to a cold day in hell before they get rid of Bella Abzug," the fiery Congresswoman exclaimed.

The real tragedy in all of this is that most of Bella's district has been placed into the district represented by William Ryan, one of her closest friends and supporters in Congress. Refusing to be gerrymandered into nothing, she has chosen to run against her friend.

Who wins the seat is really a moot point. Both Ryan and Bella have liberal voting records.

The only winners will be the New York conservatives in the state house who, by destroying Bella's district and forcing her to run against someone of her own leanings, have assured the House of losing at least one liberal vote. If Bella and Ryan completely destroy each other, the district could just possibly go Republican.

Fortunately, the South Carolina legislators won't have any radicals to exorcise when they finally get the state chopped up.

Trotters Shoals

The fate of Trotters Shoals is in the hands of the Council for Environmental Quality.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' plan to construct a hydroelectrical dam across the shoals on the Savannah River between Clark Hill and Hartwell reservoirs must have the approval of the council under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act of 1969.

That law requires the three-man council to review all federally-funded work projects which could have an adverse effect on the ecological systems involved.

The council, which meets in Washington, D.C., is headed by Russell Train with Robert Cahn and Dr. Gordon J.S. MacDonald members-at-large.

The South Carolina and Georgia wildlife departments, along with the Army corps and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists compiled environmental impact reports to accompany the plan presented to the CEQ. In addition, a water quality study was made by the S.C. and Georgia water resources departments.

The wildlife and water studies have been termed "negative" by conservationists who had access to them although none of the state agencies would confirm this officially.

Specifically, the objections raised in the impact reports point to the loss of the spawning grounds for Clark Hill white bass, the loss of the trout fishery in the Savannah River, and the flooding of 26,000 acres of land which would include 10,000 acres in the Calhoun Game Management Area established by the S.C. Wildlife Resources Department.

No date has been set by the CEQ for a decision on Trotters Shoals but it is certainly not expected soon since it must review hundred of plans under the 1969 law.

Certainly the controversy will not get any speed-up requests from the top levels of South Carolina or Georgia as neither Governors John C. West or Jimmy Carter have expressed any desire to become involved in the politically dangerous issue.

Conservationists do feel that if the project is approved, some viable safeguards will be added to the project because of close public scrutiny.

In South Carolina, Congressman W.D. Bryan Dorn, has been the most out-spoken supporter of the plan. State representative Julius Baggett, D-McCormick, is the leading spokesman for the complete abolition of the proposal.

Pay hikes

Hugh E. Gibson of The Charleston News and Courier has come up with a surprising set of figures which should have all South Carolinians working frantically for a bureaucratic seat in state government.

The House Ways and Means Committee, it seems, has become quite generous in apportioning pay increases for some Columbia bureaucrats which seem to be not only a bit ridiculous but are in direct violation to of President's Nixon Phase II program for rejuvenating the economy.

The Federal Pay Board has decreed that a 5.5 per cent limit should be placed on all salary increases for the next fiscal year; yet, some state employes will receive twice that amount and one lucky bureaucrat ten times the limit.

Under the proposed budget for salaries, the state insurance commissioner will receive an 11 per cent raise, his salary going from $22,714 to $25,250. The director of the S.C. Commission on Alcoholism will also be so blessed when his salary jumps from $17,073 to $19,000.

And, the fellow who runs the state's "liaison" office in Washington will split $75,000 with his secretary. The curator of the Confederate Relic Room will get a hefty 54 per cent increase for guarding our proud heritage; his salary is set to jump from $5,500 to $8,500 a year.

Governor John C. West, however, has diligently turned down any increase to his $35,000 salary but did condescend long enough to accept a nifty $26,920 increase for pocket money and running his mansion.

Of course, the average state employe came out on the wrong end of the Committee's Christmas list, receiving an average increase of $260 over the present median state salary.

All the proposals are subject to Senate approval, as is the remainder of the budget.

Welfare

Welfare is a sore point with a lot of people throughout the country; yet, a poll conducted by the South Carolina Council on Human Relations shows that Richland County voters are more responsive to the needs of welfare recipients than the legislators who actually control the purse strings.

Five hundred Richland County registered voters were asked a series of questions concerning the amount of subsistence paid to welfare recipents in several classes by the state agency.

And, in every case, those polled overestimated the amount of welfare actually paid by as much as 100 per cent.

For example, the voters polled said that an elderly person with no means of income should receive $188 per month from the state. The present maximum grant is $80 per month.

Those polled also said that, on the average, a mother with three children and no means of income should receive $274 per month. The present maximum welfare grant to a family of that size is $104 per month. The voters polled also thought that a mother with three children was presently receiving $167 per month.

Meanwhile, no relief is on the way. State Director of Public Welfare R. Archie Ellis requested a 10 percent increase in all welfare spending which he admits is only 10 percent of what is needed to meet the needs of the poor people of the state.

And, the House Ways and Means Committee, fresh from boosting bureaucratic salaries for some state employes, rejected even the 10 percent increase except for the aged and the blind. The blind people on welfare are to receive a 20 percent increase.

Paul Matthias, director the council, says the poll indicates "a need for at least a 100 percent increase in welfare spending."